



Ngā Whakakōroiroi¹: Exploring Hindrances in Createch for Māori, Pacific Peoples and Wāhine

A report prepared for Toi Mai

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November 30th 2022

To acknowledge the challenges and complexities of gender and ethnicity in training and industry, the title of this report intends to capture the intersections and collective experiences of being Māori, and/or Pacific and wāhine in createch spaces.

¹ Ngā Whakakōroiroi is the literal translation for obstacles, hinderances or deterrents.

² Ngā mihi tino mahana- malo lava, fa'afetai lava- ki te hoa pūmau, Cecelia Faumuina mo ōnā mahi ki taku taha, i waenganui o te kaupapa matua nei. Huge acknowledgements to my constant friend Cecelia Faumuina for her work beside me throughout this important kaupapa. Mauriora!

Rārangi Upoko

Table of Contents

Ngā Kupu Takamua/ <i>Preface</i>	04
Ngā Kupu Whakataki/ <i>Introduction</i>	06
Tuhinga Whakarāpopoto/ <i>Rōpū Whānau Methodology in Brief</i>	07
Ngā Mea Hurahura Matua/ <i>Main Findings</i>	08
Ngā Pūtake o te Rīpoata nei/ <i>Purposes of this Report</i>	09
Ngā Kupu Horopaki/ <i>Review In-context</i>	10
Ngā Kupu Whakaeteete/ <i>Recommendations</i>	14
References	15

Ngā Kupu Takamua Preface

I poua mai au, i Te Awa o te Atua, i Rangitāiki, i Ōrīni, i Ōhinemataroa, I poua mai au i te take o Pūtauaki, he ngārara te kai, I poua mai au i te puawāwātanga o Awanuiārangi wānangarau.

*He uri mākoko ahau, nō Mātaatua!
Kia whīta ki te aka matua a Tāwhakiniui-a-Hema!*

(Ngaropo, 2014)

To start this document according to tikanga, I begin with authorial contextualisation; I cited my tribal haka, I Poua Mai au i hea! (Where did I come from?) which I have performed many times with Ngāi Taiwhakāea, my hapū. The haka maintains the fundamental concept of whakawhanaungatanga (making connections) by cartographing the various landmarks around the Whakatāne rohe, and it names important ancestors known for their breadth and sharpness of knowledge; I Poua Mai au i hea situates me as a person of the Ngāti Awa in the Eastern Bay of Plenty.

With this fundamental tikanga completed, I turn now to a short narrative: I have researched into and taught across creative media for over 20 years. Last year, I taught a third year undergraduate paper where students specialising in ‘all things screen’ produced their pinnacle work with a group of classmates. Even though it was 2021 -post-feminism, post-three female Aotearoa Prime Ministers, post-a plethora of wāhine Māori leading political movements; in a time when society in Aotearoa is more than cognisant of the appalling gender pay gap and continuous ethnic and gendered inequities and workplace bullying, I marked essays that were, I’d like to believe, unconsciously sexist towards women in our class and in society at large. Common threads were that ‘girls are not interested in gaming’, ‘girls can’t do coding’, and ‘it was just easier and quicker if I (a male) dealt with the interface’. One of their female classmates spoke in confidence about how she was told by one of the white male counterparts on her project that he’d do the coding because the programme was probably ‘too advanced’ for her. She told me, “Whāea J... I use that programme at work all the time. I’d kick his ass on that programme.” This girl survived student life in Wellington by juggling a house-cleaning job with managing a Polynesian RnB band, and another job in the createch industries.

Underestimation, particularly when you don’t know really who you’re sitting next to, can sometimes backfire. Indeed, this female student was one of the most talented createch students in my class of 120 that year. If not, the most talented.

This young female graduate vowed to never work with white males again. Ana! (Take that!)

Ngā Kupu Whakataki

Introduction

Toi Mai has identified the underrepresentation of women in creative technology training and industries. While it was established that the high school curriculum was a cause, a scoping study assessing the barriers at tertiary level – Barriers for Women in Creative Technology Tertiary Training in Aotearoa – seeks to explore shortcomings in tertiary education that may contribute to the lack of women transferring into the creative technology (createch) industries. From the statistics, this is what we know: less than a fifth of women studying createch are in game development, and a third in animation and VFX. Few girls who study createch at college continue to tertiary level. Women in the Auckland tech workforce account for just over 30% (Armah, 2022). Within the poor statistics of women who transition to the industries, even fewer are Māori and Pacific peoples (less than 6%, *ibid*). This scoping study report addresses the comparatively miniscule showing of Māori, Pacific peoples and wāhine in createch to explore why this might be. It employs Rōpū Whānau, a research discussion facilitation hui, to examine from the tertiary student’s perspective why the transition between secondary then tertiary learning institutions and into industry has been particularly grim for Māori, Pacific peoples and wāhine.

A central question, ‘how might we improve the participation rates of Māori, Pacific peoples and wāhine in createch studies and createch industries’ would undoubtedly address some uncomfortable aspects, potentially sexism, racism, and reductionism. Yet providing richness and complexity in context is essential to moving beyond what has been a white-male dominated tertiary experience, white-male dominated industries, and into a future that challenges the status quo.

Ngā Whakakōroiroi demonstrates that more examination of current systems, and action in practice is needed to change how createch is taught at tertiary level, and consequently, the evolution of the createch industries in Aotearoa.

Tuhinga Whakarāpopoto

Rōpū Whānau Methodology

in Brief

A community research methodology such as Rōpū Whānau where Māori, Pacific peoples and wāhine could enjoy ‘safety and strength in numbers’ which—particularly as Pacific peoples are collective people—was crucial to this task. Originally developed as a Māori film audience methodology (Wilson, 2009–2012), Rōpū Whānau are hui specially designed to challenge conventional focus group facilitation (Kitzinger, 1994; Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999; Merton et al., 1956; Merton, 1987; Morgan 1988, 1993; Single and Powell, 1996; Wibeck, Dahlgren & Oberg, 2007). Whilst respondents are usually recruited within whakapapa relationships to the researcher, this scoping study follows Metge (1995) and Te Puni Kōkiri’s (2003) understanding of ‘kaupapa whānau’ where people connected through a specific activity are brought together for whakawhiti kōrero (crossing of stories) through work relationships to the researcher based on common experiences. While there are overlaps with conventional ‘focus group’ methodologies, Rōpū Whānau maintain a formal hui structure, and therefore sharply divert from the standard modes, particularly in terms of mihi, whakawhanaungatanga, question design, vernacular, koha, ongoing post-research accountabilities with respondents, and the style in which it being research findings is written. These are practised as a means of acquiring complex and rich responses perhaps not achieved through conventional community research mechanisms.

Responders in this Rōpū Whānau were all Māori, Pacific peoples or wāhine (US-born Tongan (UST), NZ-born Tongan/Samoan (NZTS), Fijian-born Fijian Indian (FFI), and Rongowhakaata/Ngāti Porou (RNP)). All attended Tāmaki Mākaaurau based tertiary institutions to study createch within the last 1–10 years, and are aged 30+. Three are parents; two are recent doctoral graduates in createch (animation, graphics, all aspects of design, VFX) and are now early career academics; one is a multi-skilled independent contractor in createch with no undergraduate degree, and the last is a technology innovator who was forced to drop out of her studies in the first year, due to some intense personal/familial challenges.

Ngā Mea Hurahura Matua

Main Rōpū Whānau Findings

1. Māori, Pacific peoples and wāhine want to use technologies as a survival mechanism for Pacific histories, but teachers often commented their work is 'too cultural'.
 2. Cultural preservation and supporting whānau/family/aiga/famili are far more important than career.
 3. Createch teachers are generally unskilled on new technologies.
 4. Isolated, penalised, and/or ignored for thinking outside the status quo, Māori and Pacific peoples are pressed to partake in 'mainstream' approaches.
 5. Māori, Pacific peoples and wāhine are disrespected in the createch industries, irrespective of experience and/or university qualification.
 6. The createch industry is hostile, transactional, and toxic, which forces skilled Māori, Pacific peoples and wāhine to either become teachers who are conscious of 'filling a gap' or they choose to 'go alone' in the industry.
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Te Pūtake o te Rīpoata nei

Purpose of this Report

The report *Barriers for Women In Creative Technology in Tertiary Training in Aotearoa*, published alongside this report, shows that women are significantly underrepresented in createch training in Aotearoa. These findings were consistent across Te Pūkenga, Universities and Private Training Organisations, and were consistent across Levels 5,6 and 7. One-on-one interviews were conducted with women who have/had careers in createch or have advised, taught, or recruited for/in createch industries to delve into why this is the case. These important kōrero only reaffirmed what is long known in the transition between secondary school, to tertiary, to industry, and were grouped as follows (paraphrased):

- I. Support and access to resourcing for createch across educative providers differs institutionally;
- II. Secondary school createch teachers are often not resourced or professionally developed/supported;
- III. Educators/career advisors cannot adequately advise students in createch pathways;
- IV. Createch classrooms often uphold gender inequities and are male dominant; and
- V. In Aotearoa, createch industries are reportedly unsafe for women.

It is also known that Māori, Pacific peoples and wāhine are among the lowest percentile to transition from secondary to tertiary, and consequently are not meaningfully represented in createch industries (Armah, 2022). This is the concern addressed in this report through a Rōpū Whānau hui approach. These hui empower participants by providing a safe space to speak often uncomfortable truths, to uphold manaaki/tiaki tangata (duty of protection and care) without which the research cannot take place, and to practice post-research accountabilities. Although this part of the study addresses some matters that challenge tertiary and industry systems for Māori, Pacific peoples and wāhine, others as will be unpacked below are specific to createch.

Ngā Kupu Horopaki

In-Review Context

Toi Mai commissioned this research to identify barriers to entry for women in selected areas of tertiary-level creative technology training in Aotearoa. Massey's research has shown that:

1. Tertiary offerings are poorly organised and categorised within extant SAC funding and NZSCED codes.
2. Women are underrepresented in createch at tertiary level across all years of study.
3. Women are not progressing to tertiary study in createch from secondary education.
4. There is no coherent 'pipeline' through our education system to the createch workforce.

Ngā Whakakōroiroi pivots on these findings, focusing on Māori, Pacific peoples and wāhine experiences in createch education and industries in Aotearoa. To meaningfully diversify the industries to reflect society, this shortcoming must be rectified.

Prepared discussion points for the Rōpū Whānau hui were in relation to:

- Enrolment, institution, specialisation
- Educational/cultural/ideational support from the institution
- Obstacles/challenges to learning environment
- Preparedness for industry
- A way forward for Māori, Pacific peoples and wāhine in createch

“We’re still talking like this is the 1800s... trying to prove who we are” (UST).

The following subsection is designed to underline the whakawhiti kōrero that took place in the Rōpū Whānau hui. It began with UST’s words, which indicated that the requirement of this study at this point of time is inane. The following kōrero demonstrate that for meaningful steps to improve createch training and consequently the industry environment is simple action: acknowledgement, engagement, and celebration of Māori, Pacific peoples and wāhine as a necessary distinguishing element of the wider Aotearoa createch industry, moving forward. If they are seen, guided, developed and commended in training institutions, they will advance to industry. When they advance, the industry will change.

Māori, Pacific peoples and wāhine want to use technologies as a survival mechanism for Pacific histories, but teachers often commented their work is ‘too cultural’

All respondents felt they- and on reflection their Pacific classmates/students- were pressured away from developing in their cultural storytelling. Swaying Pacific students from expressing their identity left them questioning their place in the university and in the industry. When Tongan lashings were proposed as part of a design, UST’s lecturer commented “No, that’s too cultural [...] you need to step away from your culture”. As a mature student UST was secure enough to back herself, but was concerned for younger students who had enrolled directly out of high school, and perhaps were not yet comfortable with how their identities sat within a mainstream institution. Rightly, she stated createch is a marriage between what’s new and identity, and thus characterising work culturally is what distinguishes her work from the same medium in other countries. FFI commented that she was encouraged to angle work away from the cultural because “it’s too personal”. She and NZTS said Māori/Pacific males were likely to either blend in with the mainstream or given a ‘cultural pass’. But the women want to maintain their culture in their work, and in doing so have been made to feel they’re ‘breaking cultural codes’ (NZTS and FFI). Further, NZTS spoke of being marked down for bringing cultural elements into her assessments which left her feeling ‘dumb’. RNP- who was raised in a small, coastal predominantly Māori town- was made to feel they had misunderstood set tasks. This transferred into the industry where in their experience “trying to get cultural stuff in [...] was just hurdle after hurdle”, whereas working in animation for Māori TV was mostly positive, but funding dried up quickly which meant under/no pay.

Cultural preservation and supporting whānau/family/aiga/famili are more important than career

All respondents commented about the stress they felt to choose between family responsibilities (some parental, others were financial contribution to the household in an expensive city) and class attendance/tasks. Students were told they “knew what they were getting into when they signed up” (RNP) when they couldn’t make class. Whānau who were parents, felt annoyed that in the university context, staff parents were privileged over student parents by pricing (staff “can afford daycare” UST), and placement of the children of staff was considered more urgent (“to be told staff have priority... I ended off having to take my son to class, UST). At times this caused pressure between the student, their classmates and teacher (UST). COVID-19 saw essential worker students forced to drop out of their courses or fall significantly behind (RNP and NZTS). Further, work obligations for a family to survive the week communicated with teachers (“I have to work” FFI) was met with insensitivity (“you have to prioritise school” FFI). RNP, now an academic and long-time createch practitioner, said such attitudes by teachers are a cause of Māori/Pacific student drop off.

Createch teachers are generally unskilled on new technologies

Most participants articulated their teachers were not skilled on software used in class which forced students to exchange skills amongst themselves. Students skilled on technology helped those who were good at essay writing and vice-versa (RNP). There was also a comment that the students often educated the educators (RNP). One asserted that she learned most technologies on YouTube and from other students who were already proficient in the programmes (NZTS). In the case of FFI, she presented as an adult undergraduate student and as a consequence of her experience in createch and being as competent – if not more so – than the teachers, was recruited as a teaching assistant. During a seven-year teaching stint, having designed curriculum and a plethora of teaching and learning resources, FFI was severely underpaid, exploited for her skillset, yet never offered a full-time teaching contract. She left teaching, opting to contract her services independently.

Isolated, penalised, and/or ignored for thinking outside the status quo, Māori and Pacific peoples are pressed to partake in ‘mainstream’ approaches

Generally, the whānau approached their classroom tasks through cultural lenses, but these were not appreciated by markers. RNP was directed by non-Māori lecturers to read Māori-authored books to explore approaches that were different from the classroom norms, speaking to the lack of cultural competency. UST wrote essays as a way of speaking “to lecturers without having to speak to them”. She said “the feedback made [her] cry, because it was quite emotional” considering her creative mahi sought to support people to survive tsunamis in Tonga, reaching far beyond the potentially aesthetical work of her classroom counterparts. UST claimed Kaiako who were Māori advocated the work, but no one else. Notably, there were no Pacific teachers. Outside this, NZTS and UST spoke of being referred to the chaplain (said to be “the only Polynesian ‘help’ person,” NZTS) for support. While undoubtedly important, chaplain roles provide spiritual support, but are not necessarily skilled to mentor Pacific student’s academic success. This points to the inadequacy in student services in advising Māori and Pacific students. FFI claimed she was pointed towards ‘safe’ concepts, described as “the drier side of things”, and ultimately discouraged from trying or introducing new things despite the institution’s drive towards innovation.

Māori, Pacific peoples and wāhine are disrespected in the createch industries, irrespective of experience and/or university qualification

All of the whānau experienced discrimination when working in createch industries. Despite being the only qualified technologist, NZTS claimed her experience and expertise was not acknowledged by her organisation. Whilst the “European guys” were kitted out for production, she was instructed to do menial tasks and literally ‘follow them around’ (NZTS). FFI went from secondary school to industry and encountered similar prejudices where she “wasn’t getting respected in [her] field”. She said “[it was] very hard to make people believe I know what I know, and that I can do what I do, even though I can clearly do it...” FFI was forced to tertiary education to obtain credentials, whereas her white male counterparts were not certified, earned more, and offered full time contracts. FFI was paid hourly (16 hours p/w), and took it upon herself to design/produce new training features outside of paid work hours and was not acknowledged. She left the training environment, opting to work for herself (and now has projects with Grammy Award winning producers) to avoid the constant exploitation, “mind games and gaslighting” (FFI).

The work industry is hostile, transactional, and toxic, which forces skilled Māori, Pacific peoples and wāhine to either become teachers who are conscious of ‘filling a gap’, or they choose to ‘go alone’ in the industry

Although much is learned in the industry, RNP articulated its consistent hostility, and shared experiences of serious exploitation in an internship-type situation. When others on the same tier were being trained and learning the ropes of the environment, RNP became the trainer (“they saw it as a chance to ‘oh cool, we don’t have to pay’” RNP) and there was career sabotage and professional jealousy (“one guy would hand out work... and feed you a little scrap now and then... he wasn’t giving me anything” RNP). NZTS, who continues to freelance her createch skills alongside academia, is also conscious of this, claiming that coming into the teaching environment is a means of giving students what she didn’t get. She asserted “I just want to be there, to [say] to the students ‘I see you’ [...] It doesn’t matter where you come from, I see you... it doesn’t matter if you’re Korean... Chinese... I don’t care what culture you’ve got, bring it”. FFI shared various stories of exclusion, harassment, physical intimidation, and being overtly undervalued, which forced her into contractual mahi, but she is conscious that no one is there to ‘fill the gap’, taking her expertise out of the classroom.



Ngā Kupu Whakaeteete

Recommendations

- More Māori Pacific peoples and wāhine voices from the createch industry in 'mainstream' to inspire the brown girls sitting in the back (FFI)
 - Train more Māori, Pacific peoples and wāhine teachers to see their non-Pākehā students (NZTS)
 - Professionally develop and develop cultural competency in createch teachers (RNP)
 - Upskill Māori and Pacific tertiary student services to academically mentor, challenge, and encourage in cultural relevant ways; and pay them for their skillset (NZTS)
 - Value Māori, Pacific peoples and wāhine with pay/responsibility parity (FFI)
 - Parent-friendly class scheduling, or provide resourcing for students who are parents (UST)
 - Provide affordable early childhood facilities for students (UST)
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Haka

- I Poua Mai au i hea? (Where am I from?), kaitito, Pouroto Ngaropo